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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0461  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1094  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1153  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 TASHKENT 000517

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: AMCIT RABBI AND JEWISH-AMERICAN NGO FACE  
ACCREDITATION AND REGISTRATION DIFFICULTIES

REF: A. 06 TASHKENT 1132

[1](#)B. TASHKENT 173

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In the past month, the Ministry of Justice has refused to renew the accreditation of an AmCit Rabbi, who heads the World Wide Lubavitch Movement in Uzbekistan, and threatened the registration of the Joint Distribution Committee, a Jewish-American humanitarian organization. In addition, both organizations complained that Uzbekistan's recently revised banking regulations continue to severely disrupt their ability to distribute humanitarian aid. It remains unclear what prompted the Justice Ministry to more or less simultaneously deny the accreditation of the AmCit Rabbi and threaten the closure of the Joint Distribution Committee, but we do not necessarily believe that the organizations were targeted because of their Jewish or American connections. It appears that the Ministry's threats were perhaps more bluster than real, and we expect that it will now reconsider the organizations' new applications for accreditation and registration. On May 1, the Ambassador met with Rabbi Gurevich and the Israeli Ambassador, and an independent website reported that an official of the Uzbek National Security Council was fired for allegedly authorizing the posting of smear articles against Gurevich that appeared on state-controlled websites. The report lends credence to the view that certain Uzbek officials may have taken sides in an internal conflict within Uzbekistan's Jewish community. The GOU may now be in damage-control mode. End summary.

LUBAVITCH AMCIT RABBI DENIED ACCREDITATION RENEWAL  
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[1](#)2. (C) On April 25, poloff met with Rabbi Gurevich, the Head Emissary of the World Wide Lubavitch movement and a dual U.S.-Israeli citizen, whose application to renew his accreditation was rejected by the Ministry of Justice via letter on April 10. The letter, which was signed by the Ministry's Department for Public Associations and Religious Organizations Head Jalol Abdusattarov, accused the AmCit Rabbi of "exceeding his authority" and "failing to fulfill his duties." The letter, which was shown to poloff, did not provide any further details about the alleged violations. A

few days before the letter was received, several articles appeared on state-controlled websites accusing the Rabbi of embezzlement, which he vigorously denied (Note: On May 1, an independent website reported that an official at the Uzbek National Security Council was fired for allegedly authorizing the articles. The story has not been confirmed. See paragraph 18. End note.) Gurevich's visa and accreditation expired on April 1, along with his wife's visa, and the government could in theory deport both of them at any time.

RABBI REAPPLIES FOR ACCREDITATION, SUBMITS RECOMMENDATION  
LETTER FROM ISRAELI AMBASSADOR  
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13. (C) The Rabbi reapplied for accreditation with the Justice Ministry on April 15. At the request of Uzbek officials, he also submitted to the Ministry a recommendation letter from the Israeli Ambassador on April 22. The Israeli Ambassador raised the Rabbi's case with government officials, and he was reportedly told that the Rabbi's accreditation would be renewed if he submitted a recommendation letter on his behalf. As of May 1, the Rabbi has not heard anything from the Justice Ministry regarding his reapplication for accreditation (Comment: We expect that authorities will at least make a decision on the Rabbi's second application for accreditation before undertaking any attempt to deport him. End comment.)

RABBI SURPRISED BY ACCREDITATION REJECTION  
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14. (C) The Rabbi told poloff that he was initially shocked when the Justice Ministry rejected his accreditation renewal.

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He reported having a discussion with Abdusattarov last summer, in which he asked whether the Ministry could grant him accreditation for six months or one year, instead of the usual three months. In reply, Abdusattarov reportedly told the Rabbi that, unlike other "American NGOs," the Ministry "trusted" the Lubavitch Movement, but said that the Rabbi had to correct "two problems." First, the Rabbi had to cease using letterhead with the Rabbinates' logo (Note: The Uzbek government deregistered Uzbekistan's Rabbinates in 1998, and Gurevich had previously served as its Chief Rabbi. End note.) Second, the Rabbi had to cease issuing a periodic newsletter on the Lubavitch Movement's activities, which was not registered with the authorities. The Rabbi said he fulfilled the Ministry's requests, and fully expected that not only would his accreditation be renewed, but that it would be granted for a longer period of time than before.

15. (SBU) For the record, Rabbi Gurevich noted that the Lubavitch Movement is not an American NGO, but an international organization whose headquarters is located in Moscow. The Lubavitch Movement operates a yeshivah, a kollel where the Torah can be studied, and a day school for 350 students, the only Jewish school in Tashkent. The Lubavitch Movement also organized summer camps, youth clubs, and humanitarian aid for the poor.

RABBI'S ACCREDITATION PREVIOUSLY DENIED IN 1998  
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16. (C) Rabbi Gurevich noted that this was not the first time the Uzbek government had denied his accreditation renewal. Between 1990 and 1998, he served as Chief Rabbi of Uzbekistan's Rabbinates. Following the passage of the 1998 Law on Religion, the Rabbinates lost its registration, as the Law stipulated that religious organizations could only be registered on the national level if they were registered locally in at least eight municipalities (Note: Synagogues are currently registered in only four cities: Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, and Ferghana. An unregistered synagogue also operates in Kokand. End note.) With the abolition of the Rabbinates, Gurevich lost his accreditation as its Chief

Rabbi. According to the Rabbi, the government was at first reluctant to grant him a new accreditation, but Uzbek-Israeli diamond billionaire Lev Leviev and Israeli politician (and former Soviet political prisoner) Natan Sharansky personally intervened on his behalf with President Karimov, who agreed to let the Rabbi be accredited as the Head Emissary of the World Wide Lubavitch Movement (Note: Rabbi Gurevich identified Lev Leviev as the Lubavitch Movement's principal donor. He also noted that Leviev had submitted a recommendation on his behalf to the Justice Ministry in February, before his accreditation renewal was denied. End note.)

DENIES ACCREDITATION ISSUE TIED TO CONFLICT WITHIN  
UZBEKISTAN'S JEWISH COMMUNITY  
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¶7. (C) Rumors have floated in Tashkent that the Rabbi's problem with accreditation was tied to an internal conflict within Uzbekistan's Jewish community. For example, an April 3 article on the state-controlled Gorizont.uz website accused the AmCit Rabbi of hindering Jews of Uzbek nationality from becoming leaders of the country's Jewish community. When poloff first inquired with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the Rabbi's accreditation on April 9, he was told by American Affairs Desk Chief Ismat Fayzullaev that the Rabbi had "his own problems within the Jewish community," and that his accreditation was not a "political issue." The Israeli Ambassador also told us that the problem stemmed from "unfortunate" internal division within the Jewish community in Uzbekistan, possibly fueled by the government.

¶8. (C) Rabbi Gurevich denied that there were any open divisions within Uzbekistan's Jewish community, such as between Bukharan and Ashkenazi Jews. However, he acknowledged disagreements with "three or four" individual

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members of the community, some of whom he believed were provocateurs. He noted that a member of the Jewish community in Bukhara had openly accused him of preaching against Muslims and the Uzbek government. The same individual (who has a criminal record and whom the Rabbi once bailed out of jail) also reportedly bragged to other members of the community of being an "agent" of the National Security Service.

REPORTS COOPERATION WITH POLICE ON MURDER INVESTIGATION  
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¶9. (C) Rabbi Gurevich reported excellent cooperation with the Uzbek police in the investigation of the murder of his secretary, Karina Loiper, and her mother, Svetlana Loiper, in

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June 2006 (ref A). He said that the police eventually apprehended the perpetrator, who worked as a conductor on the secretary's daily bus commute, after discovering books in

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his home stolen from the Loipers' apartment. The individual was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment. The Rabbi stressed that the murders were in no way tied to anti-Semitism.

JOINT DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE ALSO THREATENED WITH LOSS OF  
REGISTRATION  
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¶10. (C) At approximately the same time that Rabbi Gurevich's application for accreditation renewal was denied, the Ministry of Justice also began to threaten the registration of the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), an American-Jewish humanitarian organization. In an April 2 Interfax article, Abdusattarov is quoted as stating that a probe into the operations of JDC's Tashkent office had "revealed a number of major violations of law" which were enough to suspend the

organization's operations in Uzbekistan. When poloff contacted JDC Tashkent Director Boris Nedosekov about the article on April 4, he reported being completely taken aback by it, as the Ministry had never informed him they were considering revoking Joint's registration in Uzbekistan.

¶11. (C) Nedosekov told poloff that the Ministry of Justice had completed a routine audit of JDC in November 2007. JDC received the results of the audit in February 2008, which alleged that it had never registered its international logo in Uzbekistan (a charge that the Ministry has levied at other American NGOs in previous years) and lacked an adequate personnel list. After receiving the results, Nedosekov said that he called the Ministry to set up a meeting, and was told instead to answer the complaint in writing, which he did. Nedosekov heard nothing back from the Ministry until the Interfax article appeared on April 2.

¶12. (C) After the Interfax article appeared, Nedosekov contacted the Ministry again, which agreed to meet with him on April 14. Nedosekov described the meeting as generally positive, and he was informed that JDC had to resolve the problems uncovered during the November 2007 audit and reregister itself in Uzbekistan as a local branch office of JDC, rather than as an international organization. On April 21, Nedosekov told poloff that he was just waiting on some final documentation from JDC's New York office before submitting the corrected paperwork to the Ministry.

BOTH GUREVICH AND JDC SAY NEW BANKING INTERFERING WITH  
ABILITY TO DISTRIBUTE AID  
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¶13. (C) Both Rabbi Gurevich and JDC also complained that Uzbekistan's recently revised banking regulations continue to severely disrupt their ability to distribute humanitarian aid in the country. The onerous process they described is consistent with other recent complaints from the business and NGO communities (ref B).

¶14. (C) Nedosekov said that the Director of Uzbekistan's Central Bank issued an internal document in December 2007

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requiring that foreign organizations deposit their funds in one of two banks (the National Bank of Uzbekistan and Asaka Bank), which would then review the use of grant monies from abroad. JDC opened a bank account at the National Bank of Uzbekistan, and must now submit an application to the bank's grant commission every month before it can withdraw any funds for programmatic purposes (it does not need permission to withdraw money for administrative purposes). JDC submitted its first application to the bank on February 15, and only received permission to withdraw funds on April 18. JDC is still waiting on an answer on its second application to withdraw funds that it made on March 15. The bank has reportedly promised to speed up the process in the future. According to Nedosekov, at one point in February, a bank official also suggested that a bribe might facilitate the process.

¶15. (C) Rabbi Gurevich made similar complaints about the new banking regulations. The Lubavitch Movement has opened bank accounts with both the National Bank of Uzbekistan and Asaka Bank, and has not yet received permission from either bank to withdraw funds for its humanitarian projects.

RABBI GUREVICH AND ISRAELI AMBASSADOR MEET WITH AMBASSADOR  
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¶16. (C) On May 1, the Ambassador met with Rabbi Gurevich and the Israeli Ambassador to discuss Gurevich's accreditation issues. Gurevich noted that he has still not heard anything from the Justice Ministry regarding his reapplication for accreditation. The Ambassador and Israeli Ambassador had

requested a joint meeting with Religious Affairs Committee Chairman Yusupov via diplomatic note on April 8, but the government has yet to respond to their request.

¶17. (C) The three also discussed possible motives behind the Justice Ministry's rejection of Gurevich's accreditation renewal. Both the Israeli Ambassador and Gurevich noted that some members of the Bukharan Jewish community (including members based in New York) might be conspiring to deport the Rabbi to gain control of the Lubavitch Movement's finances (largely donated by wealthy Israeli businessman Lev Leviev), and speculated that these individuals may have paid off Uzbek officials to intervene on their behalf. The Israeli Ambassador also noted that a construction company allegedly owned by Gulnora Karimova, the President Karimov's eldest daughter, is seeking to demolish a neighborhood in which Gurevich's synagogue is located. The Ambassador observed that the organizations' banking difficulties might also be tied to their accreditation and registration issues. If some government officials had conspired to misuse the organizations' grant monies, they also may have sought to cover their tracks by deporting the Rabbi and shutting down JDC.

#### OFFICIAL REPORTEDLY FIRED FOR SMEARING GUREVICH

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¶18. (SBU) On May 1, the independent Uzmtronom website reported that Dilshod Nurullaev, a National Security Council official, was allegedly fired for authorizing the smear articles against Gurevich which appeared on state-controlled websites shortly before his accreditation renewal was denied.

The article notes rumors that Nurullaev conspired with unnamed officials at the Ministry of Justice to take sides in an "internal dispute" within Uzbekistan's Jewish community. The story has not yet been confirmed.

#### COMMENT

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¶19. (C) It remains unclear what prompted the Justice Ministry in early April to more or less simultaneously deny the accreditation of Rabbi Gurevich and threaten the closure of the Joint Distribution Committee. However, we do not necessarily believe that the organizations were targeted because of their Jewish or American connections. It appears

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that the Ministry's threats were perhaps more bluster than real, and we expect that it will now reconsider the organizations' new applications for accreditation and registration. The appearance of the Uzmtronom article also lends credence to the view that certain Uzbek officials might have taken sides in an internal conflict within the Jewish community, possibly over access to funds from wealthy donors like Lev Leviev. The Uzbek government now seems to be in damage-control mode and seeking to rein in those officials.

¶20. (C) Although their audience with Religious Affairs Committee Chairman Yusupov has not yet been granted, both the Ambassador and the Israeli Ambassador have intervened with other government officials on behalf of both organizations, and our delegation at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also raised their cases during a private meeting with the Uzbek Charge to the OSCE on April

¶28. The banking issues cited are also a problem for many NGOs and foreign investors in Uzbekistan. We will continue to point out to the Uzbek government that it is in its best interests to revise its banking regulations so that organizations like the Lubavitch Movement or JDC will not be prevented from distributing humanitarian aid in a timely manner.

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